

Listening Back and Shaping Form
Keynote Address for Audio Testimonies Symposium
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I am very grateful to have been invited to talk about the idea of audio testimony for this symposium, because it is something that has always been important to me as a composer. My interest in the recorded voice stems from childhood experience with tape recorders in the early 1970s. It must have been about 1971 or 1972 that one of my cousins was working as a nurse in Papua New Guinea. Her mother, my aunt, was corresponding with her by cassette tape—and that experience of the combined immediacy and sense of permanence about it as a means of communication stimulated a fascination with the tape recorder and, a year later, when I was 11, I had my own machine—a Sony TC-110A. For me the cassette recorder became a creative play space, and the magic of the ephemeral voice trapped in time has never waned for me. A confirmatory influence was the work of New Zealand composer John Cousins, whose 1981 work *Parade* was created from cassette recordings made as letters home about 10 years earlier while on an extended tour of the USA and Canada. I was a student of John's at the time, and it was quite a defining experience for me to witness the fact that he was returning to this material that he'd stored for a decade—in a kind of rediscovery-of-the-self process. Culturally this is virtually as old as the existence of recording technology itself: Edison wax cylinder recording machines had been advertised for the purposes of correspondence and the creation of domestic audio snapshots at least just before the First World War. In 2020 that we should be recording and sharing what we experience everyday via the smartphone goes without saying.

Because my interest in sound recording stemmed from its connectedness to my introspective childhood world, I made an early decision as an electroacoustic composer that I would use only recordings I made myself, whether in the studio or the field. By necessity that view changed, but the essence of my view remains that in working with recordings I am always asking :

What is the recording doing and what goes on inside me when I listen back?

Pauline Oliveros once commented that listening back to a recording made her realise all that she had not heard in the moment. In 1988 Annea Lockwood described to me in an interview her view of recording as “a transportation system” conveying sound from one space—and therefore from one point in time—into another. We can therefore read recording as both objective—capable of sufficient proof of an event and subjective since it assumes a

perspective on an event—where and how microphones are placed and so on. In one sense it turns the ephemerality of life into a more permanent object that can be easily replicated. And yet the medium on which it is stored is fragile and, like text and like memory, it can decay, be erased, or lost. So as an object we might accord it some preciousness. This stark fact has expressive consequences, and is brilliantly dramatised in Beckett's *Krapp's Last Tape* as the lone character is confronted with autobiographical sonic images: not just the written content of a diary, but with the very substance of his formerly youthful self, yielding powerful moments of self rediscovery and anxiety. Certainly in the filmed rendition by Patrick McGee, the creator of the role, the power of these moments is evoked via Krapp's reflective gaze as he is confronted with this concretised incarnation of his own memory. Oral history for Krapp, the subject, is thus seen as a hall of mirrors of memory: what is heard is memory as set down decades earlier, meeting memory as it is recalled in the present and confronting the memory of the making of the recording itself. So on the surface, an event-that-was can be replayed, and relived. The objective and subjective interact as it can be questioned, evaluated and used as a reference point for changing perspectives on our lived-out responses. The 'stamp' imposed by the storage medium gives pause to reflect. I was at the second rugby test between the British Lions and the All Blacks in 1971. I was nine years old and standing with my father in the schoolboys' embankment when an All Black forward broke away from a maul and ran some 50-odd metres right toward us to score a try. The immediacy of that experience was exhilarating, as though I was going to be bowled over by this incredibly energetic charge: the most powerful thing for me was the viscosity of the moment felt through the surge in the sound of the crowd and the physical effort made by and around the player with the ball. Today, finding the TV recording of that moment does not transform my memory of the actual occasion, but it alters the way I reflect on it. I see a fuzzy monochrome image that tracks the running figure from side-on, and I hear a compressed monoaural projection of a roaring crowd. It's *the event* I experienced, but not *how* I experienced it. Yet, although I feel 'dated' by comparing the that vivid memory to the faint audiovisual document, it does rekindle something of that original feeling but it is a feeling of turning back into myself. The moving image on the screen remains out there and separate.

One of the things I guess we will be doing in this symposium is deciding what we mean by testimony. The word itself derives from the Latin *testis*: a witness. So in giving audio testimony we are externalising something experienced—through speech or other forms of sonic expression. It might be impassive or violent, cathartic or blandly factual, it might even

be silent—an inability to speak as can be the case after severe trauma. Or perhaps even more disturbingly the silence of witnesses who, as bystanders to a brutal or unpleasant event, fail to intervene, comment or corroborate, yet might see fit to record what happens in front of them. When such audiovisual testimonies are then shown to us by news media, we are seeing these as documents out of time and context that potentially distort our understanding—are they of value as evidence, or do they become part of a constructed, mediated testimony which includes the silence, the passivity, of the one who made the image? Audio testimony might be confessional, dramatised, or fictional. In committing testimony to a recording, it might be improvised or rehearsed; it might be introspective, or be responsive as in an interview, and it might have the aura of a performance. But broadly we might also think of it as a representation of an experiential truth—that is to say: “I was there, therefore I know what happened.” This suggestion of intent may be a conceptual point that would be useful in distinguishing testimony from other kinds of evidential trace. Sound recording, for instance, typically requires an action to start and stop it and perhaps to be guided along the way, as Hildegard Westerkamp has very tellingly described. The nature of the intent behind that process may colour what meaning we can infer from it—the recording itself might inherently be understood as testimony, but the blindest of sound recordings or the most mundane of verbal expression might be transformed as testimony through layers of mediation or manipulation of context. The word itself carries weight and in it we infer at least an intention to convey a truth. Anything that purports to be testimony stands ready to be questioned for its veracity. Think of Shostakovich’s *Testimony* ... is it or isn’t it?

The recorded audio testimony exists on many levels—

As content—the subject matter or material: what ideas or emotions are revealed, what places or events are discussed.

As dislocated time— listening back to something I just did, or to the distant past

As structure—as the shape or design of the particular way in which material is revealed in time

As an act of intention— thoughts/speech is stored, or sounds are recorded, the recording requires human action, intervention and focus (though the intention may not lie with the speaker, as in the Watergate tapes!)

As setting—where and under what conditions did a recording take place

As agent—who or what is conveying the content

As memory—The recording is a stimulus and vessel for memory, but once realised it also

becomes surrogate memory

As medium—microphones and storage media impart their trace

As sonority—the qualities and substance of the sound itself

As genre—a projection out of something witnessed

As document—a recording becomes an object shaped by all of these forces, and it will normally be of finite duration

As form—the amalgam of these layers of meaning and projection: a larger statement which may express or be received as some aspect of the human condition, as a way of connecting myself with people, places, times I have not encountered.

For me these kinds of perspectives—and I am not saying that they are exhaustive—are conduits to meaning, that enable me to articulate some broader perspective on life.

Oral history curator William Schneider has suggested that in any oral history recording there is ‘more going on’ than the words. Factors such as tone, pace, hesitations and physical state imbue an audio testimony with qualities that cannot always be conveyed on the printed page. But even beyond that, behind the content of a testimony are memories, visualisations and feelings that, as auditors, to which we do not have direct access, but project onto the speaker or vicariously apply to our own life situation. The immediacy of sound can be a strength of audio testimony, but it does not always make it more powerful than written testimony. Power of affect is not necessarily in direct proportion to emotive utterance. For instance Primo Levi’s written account of his time in Auschwitz in *If this is a Man* is related with a kind of ironic calm that somehow makes the content all the more disturbing. The diarised accounts of Naples in 1944 by Norman Lewis are as vivid as they are acute, and the transition from some sort of idealism to raw violence that we witness in Siegfried Sassoon’s war poetry itself becomes testimony to the brutal reality of what he was eventually to experience. But for me it is the physicality of sound—the transportation of a real or re-imaged past space into our present one—that makes the audio testimony compelling. A beacon in this regard is Schoenberg’s *A Survivor from Warsaw*, for narrator orchestra and choir. The narrated text was written by the composer on the basis of another’s true personal account, but is given vivid expressive force through the gritty and chilling orchestral writing.

The field of acousmatic music is strongly connected to its technical foundation in recording. Sounds are fixed on a recording medium, and are then available for infinite repetition, and

for electroacoustic transformation. From an artistic and indeed a musical perspective, then, I ask myself why would I want my sounds to be ‘frozen’ in this way rather than born fresh through live performance as in notated or improvised instrumental music? For me this comes down to the idea of capturing and conveying an experience that was in-the-moment. That is to say an utterance, a spoken thought, a sound event that draws me back to the moment or context of its original being-in-time. As the photograph draws power by dwelling on an instant that we can’t fully grasp in the flow of time, sound recording gives us a window—potentially permanently—on times, places or people to whom we can no longer return. This might be seen as quite a nostalgic, sentimental view of what the sound recording affords us, but for that I make no apology!

Self-narrated engagements with sonic environments are well known in both Luc Ferrari’s *Presque Rien No. 2* and Hildegard Westerkamp’s *Kits Beach Soundwalk*. Here is found the image of the artist directing the microphone out towards their surroundings, whether real or fictional, but also turned back to capture their own testimony to a listening presence, and with narration turned inward to expose deeper, imaginary musings on sonic experience. In a late work by Ferrari—*Les Anecdotes*—we are offered 15 vignettes based around field recordings from Tuscany to Texas. As the range of places already suggests there is an air of serendipity about the sequence as a whole—as a series of chance snapshots. Throughout there is skilful blurring of the distinction between the an apparent ‘document’ and what we might call ‘otherness’ in sound: sound that is inherently obscure so as to defy precise source recognition or arises from composerly intervention, for example an obsessive repetition of a small fragment of sound, an ethereal drone, or simply something out of context. This plays on the ambiguity between sound and source in the acousmatic situation but also draws on our ecologically-based tendency to try and assimilate a cluster of sounds into a tangible, if imaginary, coherent reality. To me this work also tells us of our willingness to be lulled out of the anecdotal and into an aestheticised, musical sensibility.

So from here I want to talk a bit about my relationship with audio testimony, because it is related to this idea of the aesthetically articulated document. The piece *Ricordiamo Forlì* [*Let’s Remember Forlì*] departed from the experience of visiting my mother’s home town of Forlì in Italy for the first time, in 2002. She had met my father near there in late 1944 when he was an 8th army soldier – shortly after the liberation of the city from Nazi occupation and while my mother’s family were still staying as evacuees from the city in a farmhouse in a place called Malmissole. There was quite a complicated series of events before and after

that, set off by Allied bombing of the area followed by the deaths of two of my cousins and an aunt as a result of a shooting and further bombing. Through childhood I had absorbed quite a bit of my parents' various memories of their war experiences as soldier and civilian. But from Forlì as a place I felt a kind of removed sense of witness—through its architecture and spaces but especially sound. Sound, this immaterial thing, but flowing, alive through time: the resonant echoes of narrow streets, the slapping of church doors, the bells. Consequently I investigated what audible traces of wartime might be available and I turned to war correspondent reports held in the archives of the Imperial War Museum and Radio New Zealand. The work became a network of several layers of testimony—an interview with my father on his memory of events (which 59 years later were amazingly vivid), war correspondent reports (several of which included actuality recordings of combat and other events), a poem on child death by Giosuè Carducci (a revered Italian poet), the kiss theme from Verdi's *Otello* recorded on a dilapidated upright piano, a unifying third person narration and many sounds recorded in and around the city of Forlì, especially the bells of the Duomo and extreme weather sounds of rain and thunder, the latter in connection to the conditions experienced in the winter of 1944. Sounds in these latter three categories also formed the basis for an array of digitally processed materials to evoke a kind of imaginary-emotive dramatisation of the unfolding story. Although the work presents oral history testimonies of the kinds I have described, at heart it is a broader testimony of mine—as protest, something to hold up to the events of 2003 because the US-led attack on Iraq had sensitised me to what I vicariously understood as the plight of civilians in war. It was also an attempt to understand where I came from, prompted by a long-held sense of non-belonging. A first generation New Zealander of English and Italian parents, the 'world' always seemed to be somewhere else—relatives abroad I had never met, and a dissociation from my immediate surroundings without the support of a strong sub-cultural network that I might feel part of. Creating this work drew me into my first experience of working from sound archives. The effects of searching an oral history repository is something I want to mention, because the process of listening became for me one of imaginatively re-embodying the scenes described. I think in large part this came about because it was what I wanted from the work—to try and put myself in the emotional place of my parents in Italy in 1944-45. In attempting to express that personal perspective I arrived at what I regard as a funnel form—moving from the broad notion of place to a specific focus on individual experiences. In the course of that journey, a mosaic of audio testimonies evokes different temporalities and realities. For example, a war correspondent's description of the Allied bombing of an Italian town as it actually happened in 1944 might allow us to enter that moment as a revived present-of-the past—sonic

archaeology perhaps, underlined by the noisy trace of the direct-to-disc recording of the time. My father's oral history, made in an interview with me, is an in-the-moment reflection on memory of the last two months of 1944, such that we sense the temporal distance between the event described and the assumed present in which the testimony was given.

But I mentioned earlier the notion that, in hearing an audio testimony, we have the capacity to be drawn into the world evoked by the speaker—but we can also embark on our own empathic journey. As compelling as an audio testimony might be on its own, in *Ricordiamo Forlì* I wanted to go beyond a collage of testimonies. So here and in other works of this kind I have created webs of electroacoustic music through and around the verbal sound documents. I regard this as a kind of dramatisation, to provide non-verbal zones for reflection and as a stream of emotional commentary. This side of working with sensitive audio testimony content, which amounts to a kind of aestheticisation cannot be treated lightly—presenting material as it was told is straightforward, but framing it to support or evoke that which is unstated, or the profundity of associated emotions, requires further means. Doing this work has also made me realise how testimony extends beyond the frame in which we have thought to have received and understood it. About a year ago I had an email from an inhabitant of Malmissole, the small community on the outskirts of Forlì to where my mother and her family had been evacuated. This person had found a link to the work online and wondered why I had made reference to his village. It turned out that he knew the living relatives of the family with whom my mother, my grandparents, my aunt and cousins had stayed. I was put in touch with them and I am still planning to make a visit (the pandemic has prevented that for the moment) but I did send a photo that was taken of both families in June 1944. I knew my own relatives from the photo, but I soon had an email back naming everyone in the photo, including those of my mother and her family. The realisation that the story of these wartime events and the bond that must have existed between the families was extremely touching: that here existed a kind of mirror image of my own family testimony of that time.

A further work of mine *To the Red Sky* (2014-19) is based on the testimonies of WWI veterans. The original version of the work *Red Sky* was created for the piano, alto flute and clarinet trio of Xenia Pestova, Carla Rees and Heather Roche. The oral histories of 20 men and women who survived WWI were woven into the electroacoustic/instrumental soundscape, from which I subsequently developed a 59-minute 16-channel standalone



Malmissolle, June 1944

electroacoustic version—*To the Red Sky*. I had started searching the Imperial War Museum archives for reference to the Angel of Mons, in the mistaken belief that my grandfather, in the Royal Engineers, was at the Battle of Mons in 1914. But as part of that process, and in the face of hundreds of oral histories by WWI veterans—mostly from the 1960s and 70s—I started to enter the worlds of the men and women who had recorded their memories. This took time ... the searching process was spread over two years and many of the respondents offered profound and moving accounts of their experience, from very short interviews to those spread over more than a dozen reels. What I found were layers of articulate, frighteningly evocative and deeply moving testimonies on the war. In one, the soldier had found a group of elderly French civilians hiding with children in a house that had been shelled. He was in tears. Although I had no personal investment in any of the content for what was to become this work, my aim was to shape a form that would underpin the mosaic of voices and stories with my own pacifist convictions. Again, I thought of the work's form as a kind of funnel moving from the broadly descriptive to the poignancy of individual suffering: the final testimony is that of a private soldier looking into the eyes of a severely wounded and dying officer whom he had never met. A further point on which the form turns is a revelation by one veteran that he had 'heard men boast of atrocities'—a bitter reflection that turns sympathies against his own comrades. For my expressive and, in fact, political purposes—this became a key moment of content that puts into perspective the human

tragedy of war. This aspect of the form of the work epitomises my own pacifist meta-testimony.

I mentioned the Angel of Mons and indeed I did locate a recording of an eye-witness—the 101 year old John Ewings—who gave his testimony in a BBC Northern Ireland interview in 1980, and this led to the composition of the work *An Angel at Mons* (2014). The work's form was given from the interview itself. Ewings describes the moment on the battlefield at Mons when, on the verge of annihilation, a cloud parted to reveal an angel with flaming sword who scattered the German infantry. His testimony finished with (quote): “Well now what I thought I saw was an angel, but it was a man ... that I could make out. That he was a man.” This I read as an allegory for a human image of the divine intervening in an inhumane moment: was Ewings expressing a coming to terms with enormous fear? Is the superhuman man-angel an image of the common humanity of the enemy—especially if we reflect on the fact that the enemy as ‘other’ is the most universal and powerful tool of propaganda—and in its time the Angel of Mons became a tool of British propaganda. Despite my scepticism about the actual appearance of an angel, as allegory I am convinced by the significance of Ewings's testimony. I placed it at the end of the 12-minute work in which slowly evolving textures aim to arouse a feeling of anticipation in the listener. In these textures, the voice of Ewings is foreshadowed with wispy sonorities that hint at the marked sibilance in his speech, so there is a kind of emergence of the persona that eventually comes across in the testimony. This was my attempt to evoke a kind of subconscious sound world that mirrors the stirring of memory, that reflective zone of thought and sense-making behind an experience that we cannot access as auditors, except through empathy with the persuasiveness of his testimony. Creatively, then, this aimed to find a fusion between the image of the persona and the sound world constructed around them.

My most recent work with audio testimony is *Once He Was a Gunner*, a 56-minute work using some of the interview material recorded with my father that I did not use in *Ricordiamo Forlì*. As in *An Angel at Mons*, the work focuses on the wartime experience of an individual but spanning a wider range of themes and events, such as the soldiers' encounters with civilians as well as personal and collective survival strategies. The inherent content of the interview material was used to broadly shape the form—from the landing of my father's unit in Bari in late 1943 to reflections on his return home in 1945—framing a series of memory episodes. Structuring the material in a very loose chronological sequence arose from an aim to present the individual reflections and stories in the manner of memories

revealed, perhaps through association or as a response to some unknown conversational seed. This is precisely how I grew up with a patchwork of knowledge about my father's wartime experiences and, as was the case for many returning soldiers, he talked more about the war as he grew older.



*Assumed to be a photo of my father's artillery unit, Italy 1944.
Alex Young front left (marked with 'x').*

In that sense, I would characterise the approach to testimony in this work as a fragmentary one—testimony by 'slow release.' In fact when I started working with this material again (the recording was made in 2005) I was reminded of the extent to which the war—or more precisely memory of the war—was a current that ran right through our family life.

Anecdotes would pop up a lot, often as some kind of response to a recent event or in the shape of an impromptu moral aphorism. Both my parents spoke about their wartime lives in this fragmentary way, from their different perspectives. I feel quite sure now that this must have been because of the distressing nature of the experiences. In this same way some of

the testimonies in *Once He Was a Gunner* are innately self-contained as anecdotes, others more open and more likely to serve as stimulus for questions in the mind of the listener as to the connection with the wider narrative (these are micro-stories after all). For instance the work starts with the phrases “we had about a metre of snow overnight ... but we moved through a couple of little villages there was nothing left, not a single thing, and there were craters where the bombs ... every three feet, every metre— there was nothing left of some of those little villages: Russi, Lugo.” Placing us in Central Italy in the deep winter of 1944 this is in the middle of the time period encompassed by the work but by evoking place, climate, destruction, emptiness and plurality of experience (the ‘we’) in a single image it aims to encapsulate the work as a whole. The names of people were notably present in my father’s testimony, perhaps to some extent shaped by the fact that the purpose of the interview was to bring out some very particular memories. From a storytelling perspective this was a useful factor since it extends the range of actors imaginatively re-embodied in the narratives, as well as embracing the idea of testimony as reflective of interactions between individual people within the wider view of places and events. The capture of the content—the interview recordings—was not rehearsed and, perhaps as a consequence, there were hesitations, ‘ums’ and ‘ahs’. This also influenced to some extent the sequence of the sections with more such content in the earlier stages of the work, evoking a natural process of memories growing more lucid as they are put into words.

As with *An Angel at Mons*, *Once He Was a Gunner* deals with the experience of one soldier, but on a scale that draws together a much wider range of wartime experience: living with civilians, moments of lucky escape, fear, camaraderie, the panacea of alcohol, and the sense of loss on returning home. Content ranges from the prosaic to the distressing. This focus on the individual contrasts with *To The Red Sky*, which presents a thematicised stream of many voices. But in these works a key aim of the form was to encapsulate the persona of the speaker within the sonorous texture woven around them. This meant attempting to make the electroacoustic music function in two ways. Firstly, as though an independent, quasi-animate agent—whether threatening, sinister, calming or benign—and secondly to connect voice and music at a sonorous level. The latter stems from an essential nature of oral history: that, as we noted from Schneider, we potentially infer from the voice more than in a printed text, and we can also assume an imaginative re-entering of past experiences that carries layers of memory and blending emotions in the moment of recall: reasoning, fear, doubt, assertion, and so on ... memory-images that lie beyond the words. From this perspective, the musical sound fabric in my audio testimony works is shaped to allow the

spoken narratives to be framed and projected naturally, but also to fuse with the speech at certain points. As I have mentioned, this is central to the sound design in *An Angel at Mons*. In *Once He Was a Gunner*, for example, a short section plays with the mutual sibilance in ‘Cassino’ and ‘snow’, perhaps signalling the threads and overlaps in memory of intensive experiences. Elsewhere in this work voiced and unvoiced phonemes are extracted and exaggerated to project independently evolving sound shapes. The idea of a confluence of multiple thoughts and memories culminates toward the end of this work, with a kind of ‘cut-up/stretto’ of spoken fragments that become a more integrated and entwined texture. In directing the material in this way, I aimed to give form to the experience of vivid memories congealing into a sense of momentarily simultaneous recall. Another strand of narrative is in the sound image of the accordion (‘fisarmonica’ as it is referred to) emerging in the scene recalling soldiers and women dancing in a farmhouse kitchen (an episode toward the end of the work). This aims to evoke a sound association connected diegetically with that particular section, such that the verbal testimony—mention of the accordion—and the surrounding soundscape, including tones and melodic fragments on the instrument, are connected more representationally than ‘speech’ and ‘sound’ have been to that point. From there, the accordion’s signature sound becomes an established presence evolving into larger-than-life sound-images. It aims to suggest moments of emotive intensity, for example by extreme lowering pitch and/or fragmentation of memory through brief wisps of unstable pitch. What I aimed for here was for the accordion—detached from verbal description—to be an ongoing suggestion of the memory of that night in the farmhouse kitchen, while introducing a new element of sonority to the work as a refresher of the musical fabric. Rather typically for those who have experienced war, my father spoke more about it as he grew older and, after a return journey to El Alamein in 1992 for an event commemorating the battle and attended by veterans of all the nations involved, he wrote a short book *Once I Was a Gunner*. I suppose this brought years of punctuated testimony to fruition, and still later two return visits to Italy stimulated the reflections that I managed to record in 2005.

I hope I have touched on some points that might be useful for the symposium. But since I have been speaking about my approach to the way audio testimony can be framed, I must acknowledge that from an artist’s perspective, as does the giver of testimony, one has to be prepared to have one’s artistic statement read by an audience. This is quite a different role to that of the archivist who collects, codes and facilitates availability. Inevitably, approaching an archive of oral histories for the purpose of gaining insight into human experience is one thing, but embracing them with the intention of creating an aesthetic

frame through and around them moves into a different territory—it requires a deep responsibility toward the content. Of course, serious archives such as I have used require that content is not manipulated to alter the views of the respondents. Unlike Beckett's character of Krapp, most of the archival recordings I have used were based on interviews and these reflect to varying extents the nature of the exchanges between interviewer and interviewee. In that respect educational psychologist Steinar Kvale put forward two metaphors for the role of the interviewer: *as miner*—where the interviewee's experience is buried knowledge that is brought to the surface, a purification process to get to some factual datum, and; *as traveller*— where the interviewer embarks on a journey through an experiential landscape. Certainly in the case of the Imperial War Museum oral histories, the perspective of some interviewers seemed to be of historians who were well informed of the broader strategic contexts surrounding the events about which they were enquiring, but seeking the detail of personal experiential insight, and some were family members. Yet some other interviewers without an apparent familial connection, seemed to me quite clinical and quite detached from the interviewee. In the holistic context of these as records of data collection, the interviewer/interviewee relationship, in whatever form it takes, is relevant to reading the nature of the testimony—as is the apparent physical state of the interviewee which, in the material auditioned for *Red Sky/To the Red Sky*, could be touchingly frail. In some cases, one could sense testimony told many times over, and it struck me that was probably the case for John Ewings whose account embedded a wonderful quality of musical shape and timing in his delivery of the story. Most of the war correspondent reports used in *Ricordiamo Forlì* certainly have a sense of considered statement as being scripted and then read for the microphone (with a kind of plangent poeticism in some cases, as with reports by Wynford Vaughan-Thomas, Arch Curry and Douglas Willis). Some others, recorded and catalogued as voice-overs to actual battles in progress, were patently in-the-moment commentary—evident not just for the contextualising sounds behind the voice but, for instance in case of New Zealand war correspondent John Proudfoot's report from the Battle of Senio River on 9 April 1945, a vocal delivery infused with a distinctly nervous tremble. Aside from this, the tenses used in these historical reports can also be telling: for instance Michael Reynolds described in recent past tense the falling of shells in the piazza in Forlì on 9 November 1944, while Arch Curry's despatch from Forlì in the first week of 1945 is very evocative and apparently in-the-moment, as his choice of words transports us back to his lived present:

The heaviest fall of snow so far this winter has just taken place. The whole countryside is now a picture of winter, with bare brown trees and hedges

carrying a pattern of snow over the white blanket beneath. The roads are churned to broken drifts of slush and ice and all movement is becoming increasingly difficult. As I speak to you snow is still falling ...

As I said earlier, in the case of the interviews I conducted with my father in 2005, that formed the basis of *Ricordiamo Forlì* and *Once He Was a Gunner*, my input was relatively minimal and the interviews became fleshed out versions of the slow release kind of testimony I had grown up with, though with more connected flow of information and consequently more detail. In this case the underlying purpose of the interview—the making of *Ricordiamo Forlì*—was known to both of us, but in the course of that much more contextual testimony was gathered which became *Once He Was a Gunner*. Indeed in the four pieces of mine I have discussed, other than the war correspondent reports in *Ricordiamo Forlì*, all the testimonies were gathered through an interview process. The complete interviews themselves were a factor in understanding something of the memory-worlds of the interviewees, but ultimately I engaged with them on my own terms in forming meta-testimonies of war with them.

For me the point to underline here is that, from an artistic perspective, creating a form through the words of other people in order to frame a meaning is as much a responsibility as it is a compositional challenge. And personally I strive to live up to that at every moment. Thank you for your attention.

John Young